

Body – The Embodiment of Power

Kakali Rath

Pracheen Kala Kendr, Chandigarh, India

Abstract

This paper describes the human body and its connections with various inner and outer faculties, and other species. The body is a part of nature and a place for life's activities. It builds a self and becomes a part of society and culture. Thus, it communicates with the self and the outside world. It creates languages to communicate and creates art forms to express itself. It is the embodiment of power, which is used by the soul to realize the essence of life. Many cultures around the world are built and bound by the human body through various connections. The body prospers within and radiates light outwardly to remain as the Supreme Being – the human being.

Introduction to *Body*

Body represents a wide range of individual or classes of objects, species and texts. There are celestial bodies like the planets and the sun, and concrete bodies, such as clocks and vehicles. Furthermore, we also refer to the body of a script or a poem. But most commonly when we say 'body' we usually mean the body of a living being. In this paper the word 'BODY' refers to the human body only. Our perception of body depends on the way we describe it. We all know it in terms of biology, i.e., our limbs, eyes, blood, cells, etc. At the same time, the substance in which all our emotions are filled with or the substance where a spirit or soul can dwell is our body.

Need to Communicate and Language

One may ignore the philosophical point of view and stick to the practical one and say that our body has two major parts – a physical body and a mental center known as the mind. Though we might be doing all our work physically, in reality our mind makes us do so. Because the human body has a mind, it is different from other beings. The mind gives us intelligence and enables us to do lots of activities, such as learning, or framing. We, the intelligent beings, work like this and more importantly we work together. Therefore, we need to communicate. Here is where language or another means of communication comes into picture. Language can be verbal and manifest itself in the form of words and speech, or it can be non-verbal and emerge through body language. Today, there are tens of thousands of spoken languages, each one with its own grammar and rules of usage. However, before verbal languages came into existence, there were languages based on gestures. Conscious gestures, as well as unconscious bodily movements and expressions, served as nonverbal communication. A simple example of saying yes or no without speaking can be by nodding or

shaking our head. According to Corballis, in his work *From Hand to Mouth*, “Grammatical language may well have begun to emerge around two million years ago but would at first have been primarily gestural, though no doubt punctuated with grunts and other vocal cries that were at first largely involuntary and emotional” (2002, p.184). A small child, who has not reached the stage of speech, speaks through gestures. Thus, the body language or the language through gestures is the most natural way of communicating with one another. There is also a language of signs and symbols for the hearing and speech-impaired people. In sum, all of us need language to express ourselves.

Expression Linked to Culture

Part of our communication is achieved via the expression of socio-cultural and individual traits through which we allow others to interpret the characteristics of our basic character. When we communicate, we express a multitude of personal and cultural information not directly connected to the discourse at hand. Our expressions and language are partially shaped by what we have learned and accepted from our society or surroundings. Though it varies from culture to culture, or more appropriately from person to person, we tend to imbibe the various tenets of living that exist in our environment and adapt to them very quickly. Our thoughts and imaginations are nothing but the images of our surroundings or society or culture, imprinted in our work and expressions.

Expression through Art

The language of words and the language of gestures are not enough to express all our feelings. Thus comes another way of expression—the expression of art, another type of language. Art is the soulful expression of one’s own feelings and experiences. There are different forms of art, e.g., painting, music, dance, poetry, etc. One may wonder how feelings which cannot be expressed through words and gestures, could be expressed through art? The answer is a thought, which is really difficult to express through words or any kind of common gestures, will flow through a painting or a poem. For example, emotional matters may be difficult for one to express verbally, but poetry may provide one with a more adequate medium in which to do so. Sometimes, when words get in the way, we can also express ourselves quite well through the lyrics and rhythm of music or dance or through acting. When aspiring to conform to the conventional or prescriptive norms advocated by its respective fields of study, art requires the performer to train and to practice, but it really can provide him or her with an amazing level of aesthetic satisfaction.

Dance – Also a Body Language

Because I am an Indian Classical Dancer, I now focus on dance as a particular form of art. Dance is poetry in motion. Any theme or anything expressed in the language of rhythmic body movements and accompanied by music is called dance. According to Dr. B.R. Kishore, in his book *Dances of India* “Man’s soul urges and inner-drives expressed in rhythmic body movements constitute an art form, and it is called dance” (1988, p.10). Thus, dance is also a body language with a rhythmic movement and a particular speed, which together act as a backbone for dance. Dance can speak about a lot of things rhythmically and touch everyone. One can say the dancer is a silent speaker, expressing a lot of things and varieties of characters, portraying his or her identities, yet keeping intact his or her own identity as a dancer. The dancer is a silent speaker because he or she expresses through

gestures and body movements, without speaking in words or even moving his or her lips. And these gestures are through hand, leg, feet movements, and facial expressions, which are being taught systematically in the dance classes. Of course there will be music, song, rhythm, etc., which would create a sound but this type of sound will be a lot more appealing and acceptable than just words and speech.

How a Silent Body Speaks

Everyone knows that the silent body speaks through gestures, symbols, facial expressions and overall body language. There are many other ways, too, that a silent body can speak. It may do so indirectly, but when things are personified or when the body is used to represent a character it actually speaks through action. For example, “fire engulfed a building”, or, “storm hits the coast”. Besides, the writers also use their playful words in personifying things. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare has mentioned thunderstorm as a symbolic representation for disaster, and Cassius’s like for the thunderstorm represents his crooked character (2000, p.343). These are typical examples of silently speaking bodies. Consequently, whatever action or reaction we expect from a person, one can expect the same from these non-living objects. Besides, these things can also be used to portray a person’s character and mood. Fire is usually used to depict an angry person. The river that usually flows quietly and gently could suddenly burst into a rage by causing flood, which describes its mood-like in the poem ‘Ballad of a river’:

“...one windy night, in deepest vigils of the owl, The river rose and foaming white,
descended like a murderer, the wreckage stood like blasted rocks...” (Fernando,
1986, pp.21-22).

There are many other poems that convey the mood of things or objects that have been personified. Referring to a thunderstorm, the great bard Shakespeare writes,

I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds
Have rived the knotty oaks, and I have seen
The ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,
To be exalted with the threatening clouds:
But never till to-night, never till now,
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire. ---- Julius Caesar

Here, a tempest or a thunderstorm is used by Shakespeare to personify nature’s fury!

Silent Body Speaking from within Itself

We all have emotion. When we are annoyed, can we see the beauty of nature and feel it? No. Every part of nature would seem to tease us or appear indifferent or lifeless to us. The sun would appear to burn us or the snow would appear to freeze us to death! When we are sad, nature would seem to cry for us, or talk to us or try to cheer us up, depending on our perception. When we are happy, we can hear the birds singing, see flowers blooming and nature appears so beautiful and charming. In short, all of nature’s creations would automatically become personified. This is because we keep communicating in our mind, with them. When no one is around or when our heart gets affected very deeply, or there could be

any possible reason, that we feel or want to share some silent thoughts, we feel that way. We want someone to feel and understand our feelings. So, we wish or expect and even imagine that the things or objects of nature or nature itself, would understand us, that we would share our feelings with them. It's another way we communicate silently or secretly. There have been many poems and a lot of songs written about people talking to nature (a bird or a flower). For example, there is a poem in Oriya (an Eastern Indian language), (Dash, 1969, p.10), based on the childhood of Lord Krishna. Here mother, Yashoda, cries and expresses her sadness to a Cuckoo bird because her son, young Lord Krishna, went away to Mathura. There is also another short example from a children's nursery rhyme in English: "Rain!! Rain!! Go away, come again another day!! Little Johnny wants to play...".

This is one way to communicate with nature. Of course, we also expect that the objects of nature also reciprocate our feelings. Perhaps this is how personification might have started. As babies, we have observed our surroundings and have perceived nature with amazement and enthusiasm even though we did not know how to speak. This is the very first mode of communication that we learned as babies. That is, to communicate with nature and with our surroundings in a language that only we understand. Even though we have learned to speak amongst ourselves, we still express ourselves to nature quietly from within. And nature appears to reciprocate the action with us. It could be our imagination or our intelligent way of thinking and personifying.

Body to Body Connection: Same Body Different Meanings

First we saw that nature and its heavenly creations were silent speakers. Then we saw ourselves communicating and trying to share our thoughts and feelings with them simultaneously expecting reciprocation. A question may arise as to who the real silent speaker is? Can we conclude that it is a wish of God or a Creator that each species of his creation, including human beings, communicate with each other? Or, in other words, is it a wish of nature, that each of its constituent species, communicate with each other? After all, we have learned to talk through gesture or expressively from nature itself! Hence, we are naturally connected with each other. Really, it makes sense when we look around, and feel relaxed by silently chatting with natural bodies. This is the beauty of life. The apparent picture of nature talking to us is very comforting. The way we apply a meaning to nature through our imagination, is very appealing. A flower contains petals, sepals, pollen, etc., which are practically speechless, yet they can depict or portray the smile of a child. After studying how these petals, sepals, etc. are so beautifully arranged in a flower, we learned to work systematically and to create things that are as beautiful as the flower. We learn, gather knowledge by observing and then incorporate them in our activities. Then we pass our knowledge on to others. The interesting point is that all this is often done silently. One may consider the same flower again being observed by different people such as a painter, photographer, singer, philosopher, actor. A painter can paint it and show the world the beauty he has captured. The photographer takes pictures from different angles and shows different views of the flower so artistically. A singer can sing melodies of love or whatever he or she feels by seeing the flower. A philosopher could think of God's amazing creation or could offer so many of those flowers to God. There are a lot of ways each of us can feel or learn from this mere piece of nature, silently. Thus, even though the wonders of nature are incapable of speech, they speak about themselves in a multitude of ways through the imagination and interpretations of their beholders.

Silence Can Speak

There is a silence inside us. We are capable of staying silent forever. But in reality we can never stay or remain silent with such an intelligent brain inside us. We might stay quiet for hours yet we can never stop thinking. We might just try to stop thinking, might perform 'Yoga', might concentrate, pray, sleep and relax. We would always be thinking or wondering about something that could give us a soothing feeling, or could even be hurting us, depending on the state of our mind. That means our silence can indeed speak. When we are quiet, certain things from our past experiences come to our mind. We just might be reminiscing, we might not be speaking a word or moving, yet there would be an expression in our eyes revealing something. If someone sees us in that stage, they would possibly ask, "a penny for your thoughts?" All of us must have had such type of experiences. It is needless to say that our eyes are the most expressive part of our body. It's a part of our body that speaks about our silent thoughts. Even if we don't want to let others know, our eyes would definitely give them away. It can reveal a lot of things, unless we close them or hide our face. We can tell whether a person is happy or sad, pensive or worried just by looking at his or her eyes. Great actors/actresses often use this technique to do their acting very well. They just try to express through their eyes and let the remaining parts of their body flow automatically with the expression. As acting or expressing is also a part of dance, most of the dancers also do the same thing. Just that they do it rhythmically and dance simultaneously.

Origin and Expressiveness of Dance

Long ago, when prehistoric people were successful in scaring away the animals in the forest, they would start shouting and jumping with joy. Society then turned this into song and dance. Citing The Encyclopedia Britannica, Dhirendranath Pattnaik said, "The individual shouts and jumps for joy; the society turns the jump into dance, the shout into a song" (1971, p.4). Dance has also been described as an imitation: "Dancing is imitative and in all its forms it is an artistic imitation of physical movement expressive of emotions and ideas"---Aristotle's theory of poetry and fine arts, (Butcher, 1972, p.136-137). According to Havelock Ellis, "Dance is the loftiest, the most moving, the beautiful of all the arts, because it is no mere translation or abstraction from life, it is life itself" (1973, p.150-151). Each and every part of our feelings can be expressed through dance because dance encompasses many art forms (song, which could be poetry too, music through instruments, rhythm and also acting and emotions) together within it. According to many philosophers, dance is also a type of 'Yoga'. It's done to reach God, or more appropriately it's a type of prayer to get closer to God. Species of primitive man as well as contemporary dance professionals all undertake their dance with utter devotion.

For all over the world primitive men dance where the cultured pray. The cultured express their admiration by kneeling down and saying prayers whereas the primitive demonstrate their admiration through dance. As such dance is the earliest outlet for emotion and the cradle of all arts. --Sanskrit Drama--it's origin and decline. (Sekhara, 1977, p.1)

There are two types of dance forms--Classical Dance and Folk Dance. Folk dance is a dance form meant for the common or local folk. Classical dance follows certain norms, which

are codified in the classics ('Natya Shastra', 'Abhinaya Darpana', 'Abhinaya Chandrika' are a few of the classics in India). There are certain poses and postures, which the dancer should follow while dancing. All those gestural symbols, inscribed in the classics or manuscripts are combined together like words and sentences to form a rhythmical body language, the language of classical dance. It is said that mostly cultured and educated people can understand and follow the Classical dance, whereas the Folk dance can be done by anybody. Yet both of them give a lot of pleasure to one and all.

Silent Expressions in Odissi Dance

In line with the kinesics of Indian classical dances, there are certain prescriptive body movements that characterize this art form. There are specific eye movements, like looking to the front, side wards, up and down, etc, which are to be strictly followed by the dancer. There are also precise head and neck movements, hand and leg poses, and feet movements. While there are too many of them to specifically list or discuss here, it is crucial to remember that all of these movements, typical gestures through which a dancer expresses himself or herself, are nothing but symbols of nature or symbolical representations. A flower can be a simple example. There can be varieties of ways a dancer can show a flower. For example, she might show the flower with a hand pose. But that's not enough to portray a complete expression. So, she shows the flower in her right hand and then rests the left hand on her hips or she could make another hand gesture to show a tree. Simultaneously, there may be a pose or may be a movement of the legs to add another feature. Still, that representation may not be complete, and the dancer must also express her feelings through her eyes and face to indicate how she felt upon seeing the flower. The totality of these movements is accompanied by music, song and rhythm. Starting with epics to volumes of stories, abstract concepts can be expressed through the language of dance. Besides, Odissi dance form has three broad aspects, 'Nrutya' (the pure dance), 'Nrutya' (the dance of expressions) and 'Natya' (only expressions). Yet in all the three aspects we express our silent feelings with full bodily movement, music and rhythm.

Dance is accompanied by music, which plays a major role in giving company to dance. Odissi dance is accompanied by Odissi vocal music. So, the songs used for Odissi dance are either in Oriya (the eastern Indian language) or in Sanskrit, which are rich in literature and language. Not only does the dancer express her feelings, but also, the music, including the instruments and the rhythm, echo the same feelings. There are lyrics as well as rhythms corresponding to emotions. Each of the beats are different and give a different meaning. There are seven main types of rhythm (called 'Talas') in Odissi dance and there are nine types of sentiments (called 'Navarasa'). There are also different types of emotions (called 'Bhavas'). All of these are meant to be properly synchronized, and these coordinated steps are one of the many ways our silent body can speak through the language of dance.

The Identity of a Body and a Dancer

Identity may have two meanings. One is the condition or fact of being the same or exactly alike, such as groups united by identity of interests. The second one is based on the condition or fact of being a specific person. This paper focuses on the second meaning, that is, the individuality, the identity of a body and its identification. After all, the body is a multifaceted human being with many identifiers. The main identity of a dancer is logically achieved through her dance. However, she also reveals her nationality and culture through her

dance form, as dance varies from culture to culture and from nation to nation. A dancer performing ballet could present himself or herself as a western classical dancer. Similarly, the present author could present herself as an Indian classical dancer, and also represent her culture. It's the same with all forms of dance, western or eastern, classical or folk. So, the dancer's identity is not only her dance, but also her nationality and culture. The way she moves or looks gives her cultural identification and this varies from dancer to dancer depending on their cultures. This is because art is a projection of human culture, and culture is an expression of what mankind learns from his environment. However, there can be dancers whose nationality and culture are different from the nation and culture of the dance they perform. In this case they usually assimilate to or accommodate to the culture of the dance, apart from the dance itself. Otherwise, the dance would seem incomplete and quality of the performance would suffer. As discussed earlier, through dance, when accompanied by different kinds of other art forms, one's culture is revealed.

Identity of Character and of a Dancer's Character:

It is important to note how the identity of character is recognized through a dancer, particularly through Odissi dance in which the author is trained. While dancing solo, it is required to present a lot of characters, switching from portrayal of one character to the other. For example, the dancer presents a small child and his mother. The child is mischievous and the mother tries to control him softly. How would one distinguish between them? It is well known how a child behaves. It is also known how a mother deals with him. In this case the child, playing outside, doesn't want to come indoors, and hides behind the bushes as soon as he sees his mother. Then his mother, searching for him, finally finds him and asks him to come indoors luring him by saying that she has cooked nice food for him. The dancer presents both the child and his mother through her dance presentation. Her identity is that of a mischievous child when she presents the child and that of a gentle loving mother, when she presents the mother. Yet as she presents both of them to show their relationship through her dance or more appropriately in her typical rhythmic body language, she is a dancer. There can be a lot of other examples also to reveal the identity of characters. In Odissi dance, there are two types of dances: 'Tandava' and 'Lasya'. 'Tandava' is an aggressive dance and 'Lasya' is a softer one. As a result, the dancer's persona also shows her aggressiveness or 'Tandava' and softness or 'Lasya' in her dance.

Every person has his or her own attitude, nature and temperament. As previously mentioned, one's character is represented through expression. So dance, being a bodily expression, also expresses the dancer's character. As art is a free mode of expression, and as dance leads all the other forms of art, therefore, a dancer's expression is the freest mode of expression. Thus, one can judge the character of a dancer from her style of dance. Let us take the example of a person who is quite arrogant. When she or he dances, her or his arrogance is obvious from the way she or he moves. Similarly, if she or he is a gentle person, her or his dance would be gentle, too. In another example, consider two dancers: one of them is a believer of God and the other is a vain worshipper of artificial beauty. The one who is a believer of God, could be dancing out of sheer devotion to Him or to life, while the one who loves her own physical self could be dancing for the purpose of showing off her beauty for external and internal gratification. Thus, dance itself can speak loudly about a dancer's character.

Gender Identification

Besides the dancer's character, dance can also show masculinity and femininity. One can take an example of a simple walk. A man would walk in a way different from the way a woman does. Usually it is said to be an aggressive way for a man and a soft way for a woman. Even though both men and women could be aggressive as well as soft, there is a difference in each of their ways. While a dancer showing various characters through her dance form may have to perform the roles of both a king and a queen. When she performs the dance of a king, kingly manner has to be shown and similarly when she performs the dance of a queen, queenly manner has to be depicted, the royal style being common in both. Thus, dance can represent gender identification very beautifully with good support from rhythm and music.

It is really interesting to analyze the varieties of identity that the dancer can have. In this discussion it may relate to the identity of a body or more appropriately, a dancer's body. After all, what is a dancer's body? Is it not being used as some kind of a tool? The identity of the body of a dancer is just like a plain paper, which she uses to write the words of gestures and expressions in the language of movement, with rhythm and music. The whole dance form is a symbolic body language, where the grammars and words are symbolically embodied by body gestures and rules followed by the classics. So, the identity of the body of a dancer is no more than that of a human being who expresses himself or herself through the language of dance.

Body and Power

The human body, filled with life, is extremely powerful. Starting from softness, tolerance and kindness, knowledge and skills to violent reactions and war, the body has shown its strength, energy and power. Power is sometimes understood either as money or weaponry. Sometimes it is also referred to as strength, muscle power or brains, knowledge power!

Many people think money can buy everything and weaponry can win any war. But in reality, it's one's desire that drives one to earn enough to buy something and it is the planning and strategy behind the weaponry that wins wars. Then it is the power of action that executes. Thus, the power lies in our 'desire', 'mind' and 'action', within the body where it is unseen and unnoticed. As per Sri Ravishankar action happens through consciousness (2003, p.27). Actually, consciousness expresses the three powers ('shakti' in some of the Indian languages) namely 'power of desire' (Ichha shakti), 'power of knowledge' (gyan shakti) and 'power of action' (kriya shakti). A poet's vision (Kaul 1997) on 'desire' is described below:

Desire is the white horse waiting in the wings,
For mind to approve the experience,
Before its charged eagerness and energy to run turns to light.
Thought and action occupy front-stage, desire works from behind the curtain.

Kaul's same poem on 'Desire' says:

But desire by itself is blind,
A subliminal force without ideas,
Unsupported by the architecture of mind,
It is just a stream of energy...

Buddha said that desire is the root of all unhappiness.
 Can we dispense with it?
 No, because it is the root of energy, the fuel of existence.

To desire the right desires
 Is the basis of reasoned life.

One can see how desire is expressed in this poem. Besides, Pattnaik, in his book 'Bharatiya Nrutyakala', (1971, p.200), says, according to Upanishad, this whole system of our body and mind is compared to a chariot. Our body is a chariot in which our soul travels, driven by our senses, with the reins of our mind held by intelligence. Our mind makes our body do a lot of work or gives plenty of strength to work and reach our target.

The Science-Body-Power Connection

There are eight forms of energy. Energy cannot be destroyed. Energy is required to work and all the forms of energy invariably need a medium through which to operate. A body has potential energy due to its mass and kinetic energy due to its motion. A human body is a divine design. It has a brain center, which collects and distributes information through the nerve lines and controls the entire body. There is the heart, which acts as a pump and takes care of the entire blood circulation system. So, the body acts as a workshop that operates with accuracy. It is similar to the solar system where the stars and planets move in a very systematic manner. There are scientific forces, which are responsible for such precise operation. One such force is the centrifugal force, which keeps the planets in place and bounds us to the earth. Hence, besides the most powerful mind and intelligence, there is a force in our physical body too.

Indian Culture Related to Power

As per an Indian belief, originating in ancient times, a feminine form called 'Shakti' (power) is assigned to Goddess Durga (Goddess Shakti). Though the strength has been given a feminine form, it is the inner strength of each and every person. The Hindus believe and worship Goddess Shakti because this belief activates their inner strength. The Vedic philosophy, which is central to the Indian/Hindu culture, presents the human body in four parts such as 'body', 'mind', 'life or spirit' and 'soul'. The body with the mind within has been assumed as the 'embodiment of power' and the soul with the spirit and life acts as the operator, motivator and controller. Hence, the body possessing all the power is worthless without the life/spirit-soul and vice-versa.

It is worth mentioning here that Goddess Kali, the first out of the ten manifestations of Goddess Shakti, is considered to be the most powerful, controlling the whole creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. She represents all the forms and forces that destroy evil and promote the well being of the world. So, by worshipping her, Hindus derive a lot of inner strength. Many a time we become weary, hopeless or get wrong desires leading us in a wrong direction, we look for a supreme power to protect or support us and believing in God helps us gather our strength and hope together. In this sense God is power. And in our living body God rests within. Thus, our body is extremely powerful. According to Indian literature, there are nine sentiments: love or delight, heroism, pathos or sorrow, wonder, humor or laughter, fear, odious or disgust, anger and peace, which are there in each and every

human being all over the world. We all feel, mind, get hurt, react, love equally well and these emotions and sentiments are common to each one of us. Hence, our 'body', a part of nature, is extremely powerful with all kinds of feelings and liveliness in it. We are beings with both a powerful body and an intelligent mind. We are human beings.

References

- Butcher, S. H. (1972). *Aristotle's Poetics (Theory of Poetry and Fine Art)*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Corballis, M. C. (2002). *From Hand to Mouth: The Origins of Language*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Ellis, H. (1973). *The Dance of Life*. WestPort, CT: Greenwood Press Reprint.
- Fernando, P. (1986). Ballad of a River. *Panorama: A selection of poems, Revised Edition*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Kaul, M. (1997) *Meditation on Time*. New York: Vantage Press.
- Kishore, B.R. (1988). *Dances of India*. New Delhi, India: Diamond Pocket Books Pvt.
- Late Dash, M. (1969). *A Book of Poems: "Kavita Prabesh"*. BBSR, India: Madhyamika Sikhya Board (Board of Secondary Education), 10.
- Pattnaik, D. (1971). *Bharatiya Nrutyakala*. BBSR, India: Orissa Sahitya Academy.
- Sekhar, Indu. (1977). *Sanskrit Drama—its origin and decline*. NewDelhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd..
- Shakespeare, W. (2000). *The Library Shakespeare*. Glasgow: William Mackenzie.
- Sri Ravishankar. (December 14, 2003) 'The Conscious Self': Drawing wisdom from the many levels of consciousness, *The New Sunday Express*. BBSR, India.